

ALBANIAN HOTELS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES

Alda Gaspari, PhD Candidate

Lecture of Marketing ,“ A. Xhuvani ” University, Albania

Abstract

The tourism industry is growing rapidly and the loss of natural landscapes, local identities and traditional cultures; degradation of the environment are often listed as negative impacts associated with the tourism industry's development . The accomodation sector has been described as part of the industry , which activities cause negative impact on the environment,calling urgently for greater participation in sustainable tourism practices . Previous studies indicate that SMTEs, often focus on business returns by employing unsustainable business practices .To minimise any negative impacts that may arise as the result of tourism activities, efforts are now geared towards alternative form of tourism (Butler, 1993),which most academic literatures describes as ‘sustainable tourism’ (Edwards, 2004; Bohdanowicz, 2005). The research objective of the study in this paper is to explore and discuss the concept of sustainable practices within the tourism industry . The paper moves on to look at albanian tourism enterprises which develop their activity in Korca,Vlora,Saranda,Durres,Pogradec cities , their current level of participating in sustainable tourism practices in daily routine operations. As conclusion, findings of this study revealed hotels commitment to different sustainable practices varies to some extent and certain practices are unpopular to them . To have a tourism which relies heavily on sustainability ,a massive involvement in these practices should be undertaken.

Keywords: Tourism industry, sustainable tourism , tourism businesses , sustainable tourism practices

Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest industry in the world. Travel & tourism represents approximately 10% of total global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and covers 10% of world employment (direct & indirect). As we know, tourism development is associated with consumption of existing resources such as energy,water,oil which are limited.Tourism is putting pressure to

ecosystems,so inappropriate constructions,massive cutting of forests, taking sand from the seas and rivers, uncontrolled hunting ,different waste dumped at water is bringing irrevocable consequences to the environment. These consequences are erosion ,deforestation, disappearance of habitats etc.Tourism generates high levels of pollution, ranging from air pollution that is intensified with the rapid growth of transportation, increasing noise, increase of solid waste and wastewater pollution . Natyrally,everyone can ask: what are the risks to this growing and developing industry? Nowadays is necessary to promote sustainable tourism development in order to minimize negative impacts and to maximize all its benefits from it. The competitiveness of the albanian tourism industry is closely linked to its sustainability, as the quality of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by their natural and cultural environment and their integration into the local community.

To sum up what we said above concerns about participating urgently in sustainable tourism practices . Making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts of the industry. Based on the Brundtland definition, Landrum and Edwards (2009: 4) define a sustainable business as ‘one that operates in the interest of all current and future stakeholders in a manner that ensures the long-term health and survival of the business and its associated economic, social, and environmental systems . A sustainable business should focus on all three dimensions of sustainability:

- **Economic Dimension of sustainable business practices** -Economic sustainability refers to a business’s ability to make profit in order to survive and benefit the economic systems at the local and national level’
- **Socio-cultural Dimension of sustainable business practices** - A respectful interaction between hosts and guests, involvement of the local people and recognition of the contribution of traditions and culture to the tourist experience are key issues for sustainable businesses (Roberts and Tribe, 2008).
- **Environmental Dimension of sustainable business practices** - The environmental dimension of sustainability is the most widely documented one. In the hospitality industry a wide range of information exists about environmental issues such as energy saving, water savings, etc

Albanian tourism businesses , only recently became aware of the concept of sustainability.

The reasons why have used some sustainable practices by albanian accomodation sector have been the intention of reducing operating costs.In general albanian tourism businesses are considered as new businesses, with a strong lack of experience compared to the region's tourism businesses, as

they are created only after the advent of democracy. Albanian tourism businesses in generally are characterised by

- small size
- short-term profit-oriented
- centralised management, where the owner controls every aspect
- lack of financial resources
- short term development strategies
- lack of skilled, trained labor

Sustainable practices and benefits related to the accommodation sector

The most cited benefit of sustainable business practices is the reduction of costs (Landrum and Edwards, 2009; Bohdanowicz et al., 2004; Hobson and Essex, 2001; Hitchcock and Willard, 2009; Swarbrooke, 1999). Service quality but also productivity are likely to be improved through more sustainable developments and business practices (Swarbrooke, 1999; Butler, 2008). Sustainable business practices can also bring benefits to a tourism business in terms of positive public relations and improved hotel image with shareholders and local community. These benefits can differentiate the business from its competitors and can be the source of competitive advantages and new market opportunities (Hitchcock and Willard, 2009; Landrum and Edwards, 2009; Swarbrooke, 1999)

According to Bader (2005), the hospitality industry is becoming the greatest example that shows that sustainable practices within a business are crucial for its long-run success. The benefits of sustainable tourism practices are:

- Economic – cost savings due to energy, water management saving measures
- Environmental- cost saving measures which help to protect the environment
- Social- setting an ethical stance and support local economy.

The most obvious benefits of sustainable practices within a tourism business have a financial character. A huge amount of costs can be reduced by using energy-water saving measures like installation of solar panels. Also, energy-saving light bulbs, LED bulbs can be installed. Furthermore, hotels can install sensors and timers for light installations which ensure that the light is only switched on in areas/rooms when it is needed. Key tag controlled switches for hotel rooms are another very effective action. This means that the key card for the door is simultaneously the card who switches on the electricity including air condition in the room. This ensures that guests do not have the chance to leave the light or air condition turned on when they

are leaving their rooms. In addition, hotels can save water by installing things like low-flow showerheads and toilets. All these named measures that aim at reducing water and energy consumption help the hotel business to keep costs down. Moreover, it is environmentally friendly to save energy and water. Due to lower costs, hotel businesses can create additional revenues, because less money needs to be spent on energy, water, etc. (Bader, 2005).

As costs for energy, water, etc. are rising, hotels are more or less forced to act economically, environmentally and socially responsible. Also hotels are depended on its surrounded environment, because this is the main reason why people come to a certain area. In other words, hotels rely on their immediate surrounding and therefore, they should preserve it in order to exist in the long-run. (Bader, 2005)

The last category of benefits is socially oriented. Hotels can contribute to a good relationship with the locals and prevent tensions between the guests and locals. Especially regarding the food, hotels can make use of local products. This supports one the one hand local businesses and one the other hand, hotels and their restaurants can differentiate itself by serving locals specialties. Besides the given benefits there are overall advantages for hotels that implement sustainable practices. Next to the cost savings and additional revenues, sustainable businesses are oriented towards to long-term.

Methodology

Sustainable tourism practices ,were a distant reality in Albania, but albanian tourism businesses can no longer stay away from this obvious reality. Therefore, a study on STP among albanian hotels located in Korca ,Pogradec, Durres, Vlora and Saranda was conducted during June – August 2014 . The development of this study was based on a similar paper ” Hotel involvement in Sustainable Tourism Practices in Klang Valley ,Malaysia”. The survey involved a data collection using questionnaires to obtain information on the current level of hotels’ participation to sustainable tourism practices and the benefits generated from the adaption .7-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire(1= strongly disagree, and 7= strongly agree) . 12 items, adapted from Park (2009) were used to collect information on the current level of hotels’ participation in sustainable tourism practices, while 13 items were used to measure the benefits .A total of 105 questionnaires were sent ,but only 82 hotels from them showed their readiness in completing the questionnaire. The questionnaires was sent by e-mail.

Results and Discussion

From 105 questionnaires sent ,a total of 82 respondents were received ,representing 78 % response rate. The two major research variables analysed in this study are: (1) the current level of hotel's participation in sustainable tourism practices; and (2) the benefits from sustainable tourism practices participation. The attributes were measured using the seven-point Likert type scale with a response value of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=partially disagree, 4=neutral, 5=partially agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree.Data processing was done by SPSS programme . Below are presented data on the demographic profile of the respondents:

Characteristics of the business

In general albanian tourism businesses are considered as new businesses, with a strong lack of experience compared to the region's tourism businesses, as they are created only after the advent of democracy.Albanian tourism businesses in generally are characterised by:

- small size
- short-term profit-oriented
- lack of financial resources
- lack of skilled,trained labor.

All these limit the performance of tourism businesses , as well as the mass implementation of sustainable practices.

As can be seen from table 1, the majority of albanian tourism enterprises involved in the study are small hotels (85,4%),only 14,6% of them are medium ones .Almost 45,1 % of the respondents had been running their business for 6-10 years , 37,8 % for less than 5 years and only 17,1 % had an activity for more than 10 years. These statistics reinforce the idea that tourism in Albania has been widespread only the last two decades.In relation to the number of guestrooms 42,7 % of respondents had 10-20 guestrooms, 25,6% had 20-50 rooms, 20,7 % had less than 10 rooms and only 11 % more than 50 rooms. Also 52,4% of respondents is employing 6-10 staff .

Small ,medium or large hotel	Frequency	Percent
Small hotel	70	85,4
medium hotel	12	14,6
Large hotel	0	0
Years of operation in this business	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years	31	37,8
6-10 years	37	45,1
more than 10 years	14	17,1
Nr of employees in this business	Frequency	Percent
1-5	36	43,9
6-10	43	52,4
11-20	3	3,7
Nr of guestrooms	Frequency	Percent
Less than 10	17	20,7
10-20	35	42,7
20-50	21	25,6
more than 50	9	11,0

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Sample Responses by characteristics of the business

Hotel participation in sustainable tourism practices

The first intention of this paper was identifying sustainable tourism practices ,most used by albanian accomodation sector.Table 2 displays the participation level in STP.

Tab:2 Items in measuring sustainable tourism practices

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Installation of occupancy sensors/key cards	4,87	1,624
Energy efficient equipment	5,62	1,118
Renovation of facilities	4,09	1,549
Solar panel	5,89	0,903
Energy saving light bulbs	5,63	1,060
Reuse linens and towels	3,77	1,468
Low water volume toilets	4,12	1,551
Water saving campaigns in the kitchen	4,17	1,506
Low -Flow shower-head	3,82	1,708
Recycle bins in front and back of house areas	2,84	1,262
The use of environmentally friendly cleaners	3,16	1,374
Environment anagement involving aste,energy,and water conservation	5,52	1,230

Seven-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree, and 7=strongly agree)

M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

The most used sustainable tourism practices among energy, water, waste management resulted them towards energy management, while much less those for waste management. Most of the hotels surveyed revealed that energy use and costs have limited the hotel's profitability to a very high extent. According to this, a lot of energy-saving measures have been implemented by albanian hotels to improve the performance. In particular the solar panel for water heating (mean score 5.89 and Std.Dev = 0.903) and energy efficient equipment (mean score 5.62 and Std.Dev = 1.118) were the major practices used among all the items. Also they are the most energy saving items. A popular energy saving measure is the use of low energy light bulbs. Energy saving light bulbs was rated approximately with the same importance. Initially all the hotels made extensive use of low energy light bulbs such as florescent lighting, and now according to the last technology they are using lights with very low consumption or LED bulbs. Water savings in the kitchen (mean score 4.17 and Std.Dev = 1.506), followed by low-flow volume toilets (mean score 4.12 and Std.Dev = 1.551) were the most water saving items. In terms of waste management, very little has been done. Recycle bins in front and back of house areas was rated only (mean score 2.84 and Std.Dev = 1.262). As conclusion, findings of this study revealed that even though the participating hotels indicate their commitment to various practices which support to sustain the environment, however, their level of commitment varies to some extent and certain practices are unpopular to them. Also the dominant opinion of albanian hotels surveyed is that one, whereby investments in sustainable tourism practices is a major capital outlay which is beyond the financial capability of hotels particularly in the short-term and particularly for small hotels.

Benefits of hotel participation in sustainable tourism practices

The benefits for hotels adopting sustainable tourism practices are measured by 13 items according to seven-point Likert-type scale (Table 3).

Findings revealed that “By adopting various measures of sustainable of sustainable tourism practices, our hotel ensures a good future for the tourism industry as the most important benefit from the total of sustainable tourism participation benefits. This scale has a (M=5.7, SD=1.015). The second important benefit was “Sustainable tourism practices has help our hotel to increase environmental quality enhancement (M=5.45, SD= 1.079), followed by “Our hotel has reduced its operational cost through energy management (M=5.41, SD= 1.276).

The less important benefit was “Our hotel has reduced its operational cost through waste management (M=3.84, SD= 1.644). Potential reason to this low result is that albanian hotels didn't adapted more from these practices. Also hotels think that they didn't benefit so much from “Our hotel

has reduced its operational cost through water management. This is rather disappointing as water saving measures among hotels should be one of the most widely adopted practices in environmental management.

Tab 3: Benefits of sustainable tourism participation

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Our involvement in sustainable tourism participation has increased our customer loyalty	4,17	1,616
To our hotel ,sustainable tourism practices enhance customer satisfaction	4,21	1,790
By adopting various measures of sustainable tourism practices ,our hotel ensures a good future for the tourism industry	5,70	1,015
Guests satisfaction has help to improve our revenue generation	4,76	1,732
Sustainable tourism practices have helped to improve the relationship between our hotel and the local communities	4,12	1,738
Our hotel has reduced its operational cost through energy management	5,41	1,276
Our hotel has reduced its operational cost through waste management	3,84	1,644
Our hotel has reduced its operational cost through water consumption	4,57	1,678
Sustainable tourism practices has help our hotel to increase environmental quality enhancement	5,45	1,079
Sustainable tourism practices is now a major public campaigns in our hotel	4,27	1,595
Involvement in sustainable tourism practices has given us a marketing advantage over our competitors	4,15	1,772
Sustainable tourism practices also improves our hotel image to the guests and local communities	4,56	2,505
Our hotel has improved on revenue generation due to a better image	4,62	1,488

Seven-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree, and 7=strongly agree)

M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Conclusion

Recently,sustainable tourism has become an increasingly popular field of research because sustainable tourism is considered as harmonious and balanced relationship with the environment. It is an approach which involves working for the longterm viability and quality of both natural and human resources. . It is a positive approach intended to reduce the tensions created by the complex interactions between the tourism industry,visitors, the environment and the communities . □

It shows clearly that there is no ‘one-fits-all’ solution to address the question of sustainability in tourism development. It does, however, highlight one key universal message: to succeed in making tourism more sustainable it is crucial to work hand in hand with all relevant stakeholders .

At the end ,for hoteliers in general are the economic advantages the most relevant benefits from implementing sustainable practices in their business,they aim cost reductions and increased revenues by implementing those practices.

The adoption of sustainable tourism practices and environmental management more generally will improve the competitiveness and sustainability of a tourism destination

The albanian tourism industry's awareness of sustainable tourism is low. This study revealed that even though the participating hotels indicate their commitment to various practices which support to sustain the environment, however, their level of commitment varies to some extent and certain practices are unpopular to them . Also the dominant opinion of albanian hotels surveyd is that one whereby investments in sustainable tourism practices is a major capital outlay which is beyond the financial capability of hotels particularly in the short-term and particularly for small hotels .

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